

Sunday Message

THE WORD

Year B • Psalter Week 2

A DARK TIME

(MARK 14:1-15:47)

The Gospel of Mark has been described as “a Passion Narrative with a long introduction”. The cross casts its shadow over this account of Jesus’ life and ministry.

At the beginning of the story, we hear of the violent treatment and unjust execution of John the Baptist and the growing hostility towards Jesus, which reaches its climax in the plot of the religious and political leaders to do away with him. Jesus predicts his death three times, but the disciples do not understand. Discipleship is presented as taking up the cross and following Jesus, later illustrated by Simon of Cyrene.

It is a feature of Mark’s Gospel that no one understands who Jesus really is. Jesus does not accept Peter’s confession that he is the Christ, as this is, presumably, founded on Jesus performing miracles. This is corrected at once by the first prediction of the passion. One of Jesus’ inner circle arranges to hand him over to the hostile religious authorities. Jesus accepts his fate as the fulfilment of the scriptures after his struggle in Gethsemane, during which he receives no answer from God.

A distinctive feature of Mark’s account is the mention of the young man who “follows at a distance” and runs off naked when Jesus is arrested and all his disciples abandon him. This would-be disciple does not give up everything to follow Jesus, but rather leaves everything behind in order to escape.

Mark’s depiction of the crucifixion is unremittingly bleak: there is no hint of sympathy from any quarter. Even those crucified with him taunt him along with the passers-by. Jesus is abandoned by everyone – including, it seems, by God. His cry from the cross is one of despair. But at the moment of his death comes God’s answer, the tearing of the Temple veil which separated the divine presence from the people. Now Jesus will be the focus of God’s presence for Jew and Gentile. It is at this point, when there can be no further misunderstanding, that the Gentile centurion accurately proclaims Jesus as “the Son of God”. It is the cross, not the miracles, which reveals Jesus’ true identity. ■

SAY

My God, my God, why have you deserted me?

(Mark 15:34/Psalm 21:1)

LEARN

Mark’s presentation of the passion of Jesus is very bleak, suggesting that Jesus is totally abandoned and has to suffer alone.

The cross dominates the Gospel according to Mark.

Each evangelist has his own understanding of who Jesus is: we should read each account according to the appropriate point of view.

REFLECT

We must read each Gospel version according to the viewpoint of the individual evangelist. We may find the idea of Jesus apparently despairing on the cross uncomfortable, but that is precisely the reason why we should think about it more deeply. If we believe that Jesus was truly human, we should read Mark’s account without importing elements from the other evangelists which soften the picture. Mark tells us that Jesus experienced being totally abandoned, which may well help some of us who feel that way; that, in Jesus, God has experienced this feeling and so can understand our situation.

We notice that Mark mentions the women from Galilee who witness the crucifixion and includes by name Mary Magdalene as they observe where Jesus is buried. This prepares the way for the events of Easter morning. The cross and Calvary are not the end of Jesus’ story. ■

DO

Take your palm in your hand. Reflect on the change in the attitude of the crowd from Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and their calling for his death a few days later. Do you see a similar manipulation of people today?



1. THE SOLEMN ENTRANCE**ANTIPHON**

Hosanna to the Son of David;
 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the
 Lord, the King of Israel.
 Hosanna in the highest.

As the Lord entered the holy city, the
 children of the Hebrews proclaimed the
 resurrection of life.
 Waving their branches of palm, they cried:
 Hosanna in the Highest.
 When the people heard that Jesus was
 coming to Jerusalem, they went out to meet
 him.
 Waving their branches of palm, they cried:
 Hosanna in the Highest.

2. THE SIMPLE ENTRANCE**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

Six days before the Passover,
 when the Lord came into the city of
 Jerusalem,
 the children ran to meet him;
 in their hands they carried palm branches
 and with a loud voice cried out:
 *Hosanna in the highest!
 Blessed are you, who have come in your
 abundant mercy!

O gates, lift high your heads;
 grow higher, ancient doors.
 Let him enter, the king of glory!
 Who is this king of glory?
 He, the Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory.
 *Hosanna in the highest!
 Blessed are you, who have come in your
 abundant mercy!

COLLECT

Almighty ever-living God,
 who as an example of humility for the human
 race to follow
 caused our Saviour to take flesh and submit
 to the Cross,
 graciously grant that we may heed his lesson
 of patient suffering
 and so merit a share in his Resurrection.
 Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
 the Holy Spirit,
 God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 50:4-7

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.
 The Lord has given me
 a disciple's tongue.
 So that I may know how to reply to the
 wearied,
 he provides me with speech.
 Each morning he wakes me to hear,
 to listen like a disciple.
 The Lord has opened my ear.
 For my part, I made no resistance,
 neither did I turn away.
 I offered my back to those who struck me,
 my cheeks to those who tore at my beard;
 I did not cover my face
 against insult and spittle.
 The Lord comes to my help,
 so that I am untouched by the insults.
 So, too, I set my face like flint;
 I know I shall not be shamed.
 The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 21

Response:
My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

1. All who see me deride me.
 They curl their lips, they toss their heads.
 "He trusted in the Lord, let him save him;
 let him release him if this is his friend."
 (R.)
2. Many dogs have surrounded me,
 a band of the wicked beset me.
 They tear holes in my hands and my feet.
 I can count every one of my bones. (R.)
3. They divide my clothing among them.
 They cast lots for my robe.
 O Lord, do not leave me alone,
 my strength, make haste to help me! (R.)
4. I will tell of your name to my brethren
 and praise you where they are assembled.
 "You who fear the Lord give him praise;
 all sons of Jacob, give him glory.
 Revere him, Israel's sons." (R.)

SECOND READING Philippians 2:6-11

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the
 Philippians.

His state was divine,
 yet Christ Jesus did not cling
 to his equality with God
 but emptied himself
 to assume the condition of a slave,
 and became as men are,
 and being as all men are,
 he was humbler yet,
 even to accepting death,
 death on a cross.
 But God raised him high
 and gave him the name
 which is above all other names
 so that all beings
 in the heavens, on earth and in the
 underworld,
 should bend the knee at the name of Jesus
 and that every tongue should acclaim
 Jesus Christ as Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.
 The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

**Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory!
 Christ was humbler yet,
 even to accepting death, death on a cross.
 But God raised him high
 and gave him the name which is above all
 names.
 Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory!**

GOSPEL

Mark 14:1-15:47

The passion of our Lord Jesus Christ
 according to Mark.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

**I believe in God,
 the Father almighty,
 Creator of heaven and earth,
 and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,**
(all bow during the next two lines)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
 born of the Virgin Mary,
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died and was buried;
 he descended into hell;
 on the third day he rose again from the dead;
 he ascended into heaven,
 and is seated at the right hand of God the
 Father almighty;
 from there he will come to judge the living
 and the dead.
 I believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the holy catholic Church,
 the communion of saints,
 the forgiveness of sins,
 the resurrection of the body,
 and life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Through the Passion of your Only Begotten
 Son, O Lord,
 may our reconciliation with you be near at
 hand,
 so that, though we do not merit it by our own
 deeds,
 yet by this sacrifice made once for all,
 we may feel already the effects of your mercy.
 Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**Father, if this chalice cannot pass without my
 drinking it,
 your will be done.**

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Nourished with these sacred gifts,
 we humbly beseech you, O Lord,
 that, just as through the death of your Son
 you have brought us to hope for what we
 believe,
 so by his Resurrection
 you may lead us to where you call.
 Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Lent is like a long "retreat" during which
 we can turn back into ourselves and listen
 to the voice of God, in order to defeat the
 temptations of the Evil One. It is a period
 of spiritual "combat" which we must
 experience alongside Jesus, not with pride
 and presumption, but using the arms of
 faith: prayer, listening to the word of God
 and penance. In this way we will be able to
 celebrate Easter in truth, ready to renew the
 promises of our Baptism.

Pope Benedict XVI

